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# Painted Inscriptions and Graffiti in the Jewish Catacombs of Venosa: An Annotated Inventory

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## Abstract

Since the official discovery of the Jewish catacombs of Venosa, Italy, in 1853, about 80 epitaphs and graffiti written in Hebrew, Greek and Latin have been found. These epitaphs constitute a unique source of information on the lives, family relationships and social status of the Jews living in late ancient Venusia. Although almost all of these inscriptions have long been accessible in published form, many doubts nonetheless persist as to their exact locations in the catacombs, and whether or not they remain *in situ* today. This article presents the results of a general survey undertaken in the catacombs in recent years, showing what has been lost and what actually remains.

## Keywords

Hebrew – Jewish inscriptions – Venosa

In this paper, I provide some fresh information about the 78 currently known painted inscriptions and graffiti in the Jewish catacombs of Venosa (ancient Venusia; Fig. 1), which date back to the 4th to 6th centuries CE.<sup>1</sup> Aside from a few texts mentioned here for the first time or not yet previously published in full, all of them were included in David Noy’s inestimable *J1WE*, vol. I (nos. 42–116). However, since its publication (1993; partially updated in Noy 2005: 129–30),

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1 As strange as it sounds, a general description and publication on the Venosa catacombs and the other funerary areas on the Maddalena hill is not yet available. Basic introductions to the Jewish catacombs can be found in Leon 1953–54; Zevi 1992: 176–78; Noy 1993: xv–xxi; 1994; Colafemmina 2003: 120–29.

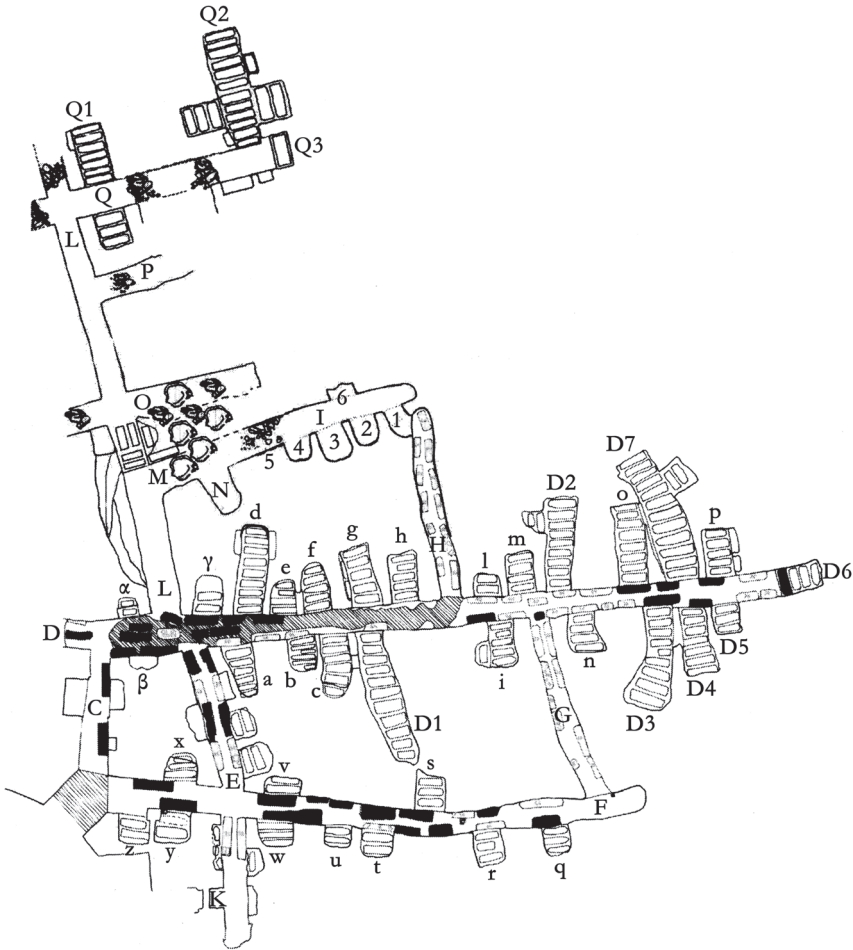


FIGURE 1 Plan of the Venosa Catacombs  
 EDITED AFTER NAVA 2005; COURTESY OF SABAP-BAS

many things have happened both inside and outside the site, whose appearance changed significantly around the turn of the 21st century. Indeed, in this period, extensive conservation and restoration works were carried out in order to secure the site and facilitate visits, at least to some galleries.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, due

2 Officially discovered in 1853, but already known beforehand, the catacombs—subject to continuous damage and pillage for decades (Lacerenza 1998: 310–66), as well as to various regional earthquakes (1930, 1980, 1981, 1996)—long remained closed to the public, until massive reinforcement and excavation works were carried out, particularly in the 1990s and between 2003 and 2004, when a partial archaeological exploration was also attempted. See Lazzari (2000), Nava (2005: 377–78), Tagliente (2006: 754).

in part to the limited accessibility of the site in 1991, Noy was able to personally check only a few inscriptions: therefore, the texts included in *JWE* are said to be *in situ* or 'lost' on the basis of previous literature—Cesare Colafemmina's publications in particular, with respect to southern Italy—or gathered locally from indirect information.

In trying to understand what remains *in situ*, what has been lost and what can still in fact be found, after several years of surveys and archival research, I have ascertained that many epitaphs were already lost or damaged long before 1993, and the locations of some epitaphs appear to have been mistaken already in the early literature. In order to discover more about this process of deterioration, in conjunction with ongoing field research, I have also collected all the photographic and other visual documentation available—ancient and modern photographs, drawings, apographs, and squeezes—whose comparison, makes it easier to determine when and how these inscriptions were damaged, destroyed, and if the damage done was due to natural causes. In many cases, this documentation sheds valuable light on the reading of the epitaphs (a topic that shall be not elaborated here), as well as on the vicissitudes that affected the Venosa catacombs as a whole.<sup>3</sup>

## Gallery D

### *Da*

1. Gallery D, right side; arcosolium Da, outer wall of the arcosolium opening, right; *JWE* I 42.<sup>4</sup>

Epitaph of Beronice.

Lost (*JWE*: *in situ*). According to d'Aloe, this inscription was painted in red “nello spigolo a destra della Cella 2.<sup>da</sup> del lato diritto del corridoio principale”. This indication points to Da, on the outer face of the wall of the arcosolium opening, presumably towards the top, where the original plaster cladding has

3 For the first apographs of Pasquale de Angelis and Raffaele Smith and of Stanislao d'Aloe (1853) and their multiple copies, see Lacerenza (1998: 325–58, 393–402, 410–11; 2018 [contains the first photographs taken in the catacombs, captured by Nikolaus Müller in 1904]).

4 I have introduced here a new numbering of the texts, according to their successive locations in the galleries and arcosolia, starting from the current entrance (from the corner between galleries F and C, going towards D). For the gallery sigla (D, E, F, etc.), so as not to create confusion, I make reference to the usual sigla, which date back to the survey of de Angelis and Smith, subsequently adopted by Colafemmina (1978) and Dell'Aquila (1979). In order to indicate loci not included in previous plans, I have prepared a slightly adjusted version of the drawing included in Nava (2005, fig. 1). It was necessary to add new letters (a–z, α–γ) for those arcosolia still lacking any identification.

fallen down. On its surviving portions one can observe various modern scrawls, but no ancient inscriptions.

2. Gallery D, right side; arcosolium Da, outer wall of the arcosolium opening, left; JIWE I 44.

Epitaph of Longinus (?).

Lost (JIWE: *in situ*). For d'Aloe, the text, once painted in red, was “nello spigolo a sinistra” when facing Da. Therefore, the text was on the outer wall to the left of the arcosolium opening. This is not the original wall, however, which had possibly fallen down after the 1980 or 1996 collapses, and was then reconstructed or reinforced with stone blocks, just like other parts of the same arcosolium and other sections. On the outer face of Da, at left, in the upper section close to the arch, only a small portion of the original plaster cladding survives, with many modern graffiti but no ancient ones; additionally, there are perhaps a few letters on the top right.

### *Dd*

3. Gallery D, left side; arcosolium Dd, grave 1; JIWE I 43.

Epitaph of Ioses (?).

Present location unknown (JIWE: *in situ*). Three fragments of this epitaph, incised in the mortar, were found inside the first grave of arcosolium Dd by Colafemmina in 1974, in which period he had virtually unlimited access to the site. All of the graves in this arcosolium—as well as, almost every exposed burial in the galleries—appear to be have been cleaned in later times, but it is possible that the fragments have been preserved somewhere, perhaps in the repositories of the National Archaeological Museum of Venosa. For some reason, Colafemmina (1975: no. VII, pl. XIV.2) published only a photograph of the main fragment with the letters [-]EIOC[-], leaving out the other two, with the letters [-]Π[-] and [-]Ω[-] (on which see also below, no. 13). The latter can be seen, however, in a photograph published here for the first time (Fig. 2).<sup>5</sup>

5 The photograph is part of a set of prints that Colafemmina sent to Giovanni Garbini when the latter was editor-in-chief of the *Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli* (incidentally, this same review) in order to have the prints examined and possibly published by Francesco Vattioni, professor of Biblical Hebrew in Naples, who was interested in Jewish anthroponymy and knew Colafemmina very well. Vattioni, however, never found a way to make use of this material, and Garbini himself, many years later, generously donated the whole packet of photographs to me, being aware of my interest in the subject (and my first article concerning the Venosa epitaphs, Lacerenza 1989, was in fact completed under his supervision).

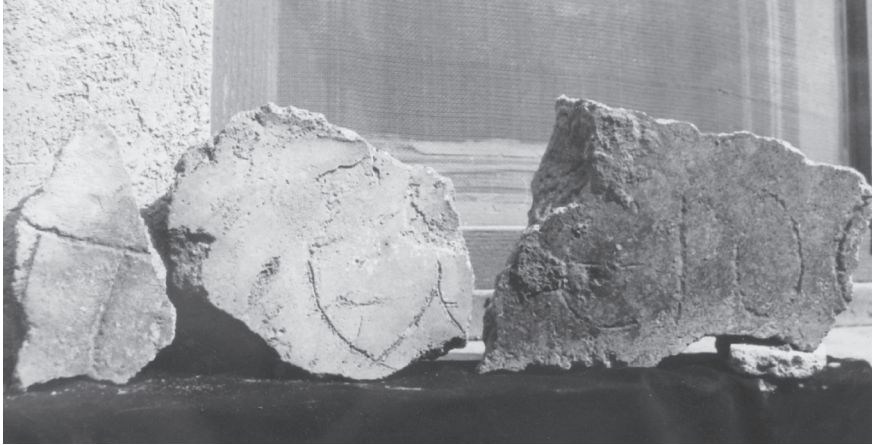


FIGURE 2 Epitaph no. 3

PHOTO C. COLAFEMMINA, DETAIL; COURTESY OF G. GARBINI

4. Gallery D, left side; arcosolium Dd, grave 6, on right side; JIWE I 45.

Epitaph of (unknown).

Still *in situ*. The location of the epitaph as Colafemmina describes it (1975: no. VI, pl. XIV.1) is misleading, as he writes “a capo della sesta tomba posta nel cubicolo prospiciente *b*”. Since one would assume that *b* denotes arcosolium Db, this indication would point to arcosolium De (where only five graves can be found), while the epitaph is actually in Dd, in the position described by Colafemmina. It follows that the *b* in his description must refer to text indicated as (b) in de Angelis and Smith’s report (our no. 2).<sup>6</sup> It should be added that the remains of some other letter can be seen below τᾶφως.

*Dc*

5. Gallery D, right side; arcosolium Dc, on the right; JIWE I 46.

Epitaph of Casta.

Lost (JIWE: *in situ*). De Angelis and Smith do not specify whether this long inscription was painted or incised. The De Rossi Ms., used extensively by J.-B. Frey in the preparation of his *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum* and whose source is perhaps the original copy made by Raffaele Smith,<sup>7</sup> labels it “graffito”

6 It is worth noting that de Angelis and Smith adopted two different kinds of numbering for the 46 inscriptions they copied and sent to the Real Museo Borbonico in Naples. While the first numeration uses numerals (1–46), the second uses letters (*a–z*); the latter restarts from *a* in each gallery and in the main arcosolia.

7 On the complicated history of the De Rossi Ms., see Frey (in CIJ, pp. 421–22) and Lacerenza (1998: 294–95, fn. 3). I am currently inclined to believe that the anonymous *cartello*

(CIJ 588), though on the outer walls beside the arcosolia openings, texts were usually painted in red (letters were sometimes also lightly incised in the plaster). On the remaining parts of the original cladding, which partially continues also inside the arcosolium, many modern graffiti can be found, which could possibly obscure some ancient signs or letters; inside, on the vault, some modern graffiti were rendered using candle smoke.

### *D<sub>1</sub>*

6–12. Gallery D, right side; arcosolium D<sub>1</sub>; JIWE I 47–53.

Epitaph of Asther, daughter of Syrianus.

Epitaph of Severa, daughter of Jacob.

*Šalom.*

Epitaph of Anicetus.

(menorah).

Epitaph of Anastasius.

Epitaph of Callistus.

All lost (JIWE: 47–48, 50–52 *in situ*; 49 and 53 lost). According to Noy's personal inspection, in this arcosolium, bearing 11 graves, "the inscriptions are no longer readily visible" (p. 66). In fact, despite a large portion of original cladding still being extant, especially in the innermost parts, all of its epitaphs are now lost.

13. Gallery D, right side; arcosolium D<sub>1</sub> or D<sub>2</sub> (?); JIWE I 54.

Single Greek fragment [-]ω[-].

Lost. This could be the fragment of the same letter later found by Cola-femmina in D<sub>2</sub> (see above, no. 3).

### *D<sub>g</sub>*

14. Gallery D, left side; arcosolium D<sub>g</sub>, grave 1; unpublished.

Greek letters (?).

Inside grave 1, towards its upper border, amidst the traces left by the *fossore*s, one finds some signs that could represent 2 to 3 Greek letters (height: 4–5 cm). The position is unusual but the carving seems ancient.

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(presumably, a large piece of cardboard) from which G.B. de Rossi copied all the texts found in the catacomb at that time was the original one authored by Raffaele Smith, which upon his death passed to Giulio Minervini, who then allowed De Rossi to make a copy. This document, once kept in Naples and now lost, also included brief topographical indications and other notes, which were not included in the booklet with the de Angelis and Smith report that circulated in the second half of the 19th century. See also no. 26 below.

*D2*

## 15. Gallery D, left side; arcosolium D2; JIWE I 56.

Signpost of Faustinus *pater's* arcosolium.

Still *in situ*, but l. 1 is lost. This inscription, originally divided into three lines, is painted in red on a *tabula ansata* that is placed on the outer face of the left wall at the arcosolium opening, towards the upper right corner, just above a large nine-branched menorah. This is the first arcosolium of the Faustini (the other one being D7; see Williams 1999: 46). As is well known, this inscription is not the real epitaph of Faustinus (which is inside the arcosolium, no. 19), but just its “signpost”, as said by Noy. The inscription is well-preserved and has long been fully readable, but JIWE does not mention that it actually lacks the first line (with the words ABSIDA VBI) due to the vault’s having been lowered, apparently shortly before 1989, as declared in a note (“la prima riga è stata coperta di recente”) on a photograph taken that year within the framework of the ARS project “Presenza ebraica in Italia” (Jewish Presence in Italy).<sup>8</sup> A good, though unpublished photograph of this inscription, while still untouched, was taken by Colafemmina in the early ’70s (Fig. 3).



FIGURE 3 Epitaph no. 15

PHOTO C. COLAFEMMINA; COURTESY OF G. GARBINI

<sup>8</sup> The ARS (Antichità-Ricerca-Sviluppo) database is now located at the Centro Bibliografico UCEI in Rome. I owe many thanks to Dario Disegni, chair of the FBCEI, for having granted me access to this resource, currently in the process of reorganization.



16. Gallery D, left side; arcosolium D2, left wall, outer face; JIWE I 57.

Hebrew letter *šin*.

Still *in situ*. On the outer face of the wall to the right of arcosolium opening, to the left, just below the second nine-branched menorah. Based on the photographs of Nikolaus Müller, at the beginning of 20th century, the letter was still untouched; only later (before 1989) did it sustain damage in the form of deep grooves (Lacerenza 2018: 9, no. 1).

17. Gallery D, left side; arcosolium D2, right side, grave 6; JIWE I 59.

Epitaph of Beronice.

Still *in situ*. In JIWE it is listed as inscribed, but this is doubtful: indeed, it was originally painted in red, and the brush left some light marks on the wet plaster. For some reason, however, the painting faded considerably, more so than any other inscription in proximity.

18. Gallery D, left side; arcosolium D2, right side, grave 5; JIWE I 60.

Epitaph of (unknown).

Still *in situ*. The epitaph refers to grave 5 (more precisely, it lies in between graves 5 and 4), and not to 6 as reported in JIWE. Strangely enough, the remains of this epitaph were never noticed before Colafemmina's 1973 inspection and his subsequent publication (1974: no. IV). Even Colafemmina, however, wasn't completely accurate: the remains of some additional letters, also painted in red, can be detected just above the known text, and formed part of two or three additional lines (Fig. 4). These letters are clearly visible at the borders of a large lacuna in the plaster (only an A/M remains on the top left, and a N on the bottom right), and they are not necessarily connected with JIWE I 60. The arrangement of the space is indeed somewhat asymmetrical, and it is not to be excluded that the first lines were actually part of another epitaph, originally placed just below the small arcosolium above (which includes the epitaph of Catella no. 26, JIWE I 68).

19. Gallery D, left side; arcosolium D2, to the right, grave 7; JIWE I 61.

Epitaph of Faustinus *pater*.

Still *in situ*; painted in red, with underlying traces of graffiti, though not for every word. The inscription was still intact at the time of its discovery, but today appears in a poor state of preservation, like almost every epitaph on the lower side of the right wall. As demonstrated elsewhere (Lacerenza 2018: 10, no. 3), this dramatic damage to many epitaphs in the catacomb, as well as the loss of more or less significant parts of the mortar and plaster cladding placed on top of the graves (where most likely the epitaphs were usually added soon after the burial), can be attributed to the practice of searching for more graves behind the inscriptions. As the examination of photographic and other visual documentation clearly shows, for a period after the earliest investigations, grave



FIGURE 4 Epitaph no. 18

PHOTO G. LACERENZA; COURTESY OF SABAP-BAS

robbers would insert a small hole (about 10 cm wide) towards the middle of the epitaphs, trying to establish whether there was a tomb behind it. This can also be seen in Müller's 1904 photograph of this same epigraph (in Lacerenza 2018: 10, no. 2). Behind the epitaphs above the ground burials, there was usually nothing besides the original sandstone wall: unfortunately, those holes caused cracks in the plaster and, within a few years or decades, many holes become increasingly bigger, often causing the total or partial collapse of the epitaphs. As seen in the photographs taken by Colafemmina and Franco Dell'Aquila in the early '70s, most of these holes were made some time earlier (Fig. 5).

20. Gallery D, left side; arcosolium D2, to the right, grave 8, under no. 21; JIWE I 62.

Epitaph of Mannines.

Lost (JIWE: *in situ*). The epitaph, almost intact when discovered (except for the last line), still appears in Colafemmina's photographs, though it was already damaged by then (see Fig. 5). A few remnants of red letters can be detected along the right edge of the surviving portion of plaster.

21. Gallery D, left side; arcosolium D2, to the right, above no. 20; JIWE I 63.  
Epitaph of Alexandra *pateressa*.



FIGURE 5 Epitaphs nos. 19–21

PHOTO C. COLAFEMMINA; COURTESY OF G. GARBINI

Still *in situ*. Currently with some holes on the surface, but Colafemmina's photograph (Fig. 5) shows the text in a more complete state. According to Noy, the epitaph should belong to grave 8, but this seems unlikely, given its position; perhaps it refers in some way to the arcosolium on the right, with the large Latin inscription, no. 25, inside.

22. Gallery D, left side; arcosolium D2, to the right, grave 9; JIWE I 64.

Epitaph of (?) *archisynagogos*.

Still *in situ*. As in the case of no. 19, Müller's 1904 photograph is the only testimony, alongside 19th-century apographs, of the text in its full extent. Müller's image already shows the 'test hole' presumably made by grave robbers (Lacerenza 2018: 10 no. 3).

23. Gallery D, left side; arcosolium D2, extension to the left, grave 1; JIWE I 65.

Epitaph of Faustina.

Still *in situ*. The epitaph is on the wall over the first grave in the arcosolium, and very easy to spot. It is not known when the lower part of the inscription collapsed. Unfortunately, as is almost always the case, for some inexplicable reason there are no fragments in the grave or in its immediate vicinity. Photographs of the catacombs prior to the earthquake of 1980 show that both the galleries and graves were covered by stone blocks, sometimes very large; broken bricks, and other kinds of debris, not to mention a number of human remains. What happened to all the materials still awaiting study is still unclear.

24. Gallery D, left side; arcosolium D2, extension to the left, grave 2; JIWE I 66.

Epitaph of Pretiosa.

Still *in situ*. The text, though rather faded, is still readable and almost complete, with minor exceptions in the last line.

25. Gallery D, left side; arcosolium D2, to the right, first monosome arcosolium from the left; JIWE I 67.

Epitaph of Marcellus.

Still *in situ*. The epitaph was painted in the inner part of this small arcosolium, the first of five monosome burials excavated from the right wall of D2. Being a single tomb, it cannot perhaps be considered a true extension of D2 (while on the opposite wall, there is a genuine extension of D2, with a sequence of burials in the ground). The text on the lateral surfaces is now almost totally lost due to the collapse of the plaster cladding. On the external surface of the arcosolium, to the right, one can see various red marks that appear to be ancient fingerprints.

26. Gallery D, left side; arcosolium D2; second monosome arcosolium from the left, above an arched loculus without any preserved epitaph; JIWE I 68.

Epitaph of Catella.

Still *in situ*, though broken in the lower part, with letters missing from the left corner. The text is inscribed in a rectangular *tabula*, without handles. An interesting detail, never before pointed out, is that the *tabula* is not just painted, but also incised into the plaster: certainly this was done before the execution of the epitaph. In 19th-century apographs, the presence of the menorah

is recorded only in the De Rossi manuscript, another clue that its source was not one of the multiple copies of the de Angelis–Smith report, but presumably Smith's original file (see above, fn. 7).

### D<sub>3</sub>

27. Gallery D, right side; arcosolium D<sub>3</sub>, to the left, grave 6; JIWE I 69.

Epitaph of Iusta.

Still *in situ*. Except for the usual 'test hole', the plaster support of the epitaph is still intact: unfortunately, the text is faded and almost illegible. The same kind of pigment decay can be observed in no. 28, the epitaph immediately following.

28. Gallery D, right side; arcosolium D<sub>3</sub>, to the left, grave 7; JIWE I 70.

Epitaph of Yosef.

Still *in situ*; same state of preservation as no. 27. Amidst the letters, one can detect an incised graffito outline. The Hebrew line at the bottom has almost vanished.

### D<sub>4</sub>

29. Gallery D, right side; arcosolium D<sub>4</sub>, to the left, grave 3; JIWE I 71.

Epitaph of Faustina.

Still *in situ* (JIWE, erroneously: grave 2), but few remnants survive (see Fig. 6, left).

30. Gallery D, right side; arcosolium D<sub>4</sub>, to the left, grave 4; unpublished (?).

Epitaph of (unknown).

Still *in situ*. Above grave 4, between nos. 29 and 31 there are the remnants of an epitaph that seems to have been overlooked to this day, or at least appears to have been unnoticed in previous reports (Fig. 6, centre). Only a couple of letters, painted in red and about 5.7 cm high, survive: [-].?C[-], which could be either Latin or Greek.

31. Gallery D, right side; arcosolium D<sub>4</sub>, to the left, grave 5; JIWE I 72.

Epitaph of Ana.

Still *in situ* (Fig. 6, right). The plaster cladding is an unusual colour: white, not cream or beige as in the majority of other places in the catacomb, at least over the graves. This epitaph appears to be located between tombs 4 and 5, and some fragments found in grave 4 (bottom right, Figs. 6, 7) could tip the scale in favour of this tomb. However, their presence in grave 4 is not necessarily due to the fragments having fallen directly from the wall into this grave; indeed, the existence of epitaph no. 30, unrelated to these fragments, on grave 4 implies that the fragments did not originate here.



FIGURE 6 Epitaphs nos. 29–31  
PHOTO G. LACERENZA; COURTESY OF SABAP–BAS



FIGURE 7 Epitaph no. 31  
PHOTO G. LACERENZA; COURTESY OF SABAP–BAS

32. Gallery D, right side; arcosolium D4, to the left, grave 6; JIWE I 73.  
Epitaph of (unknown).

Still *in situ* (JIWE: lost?). In the de Angelis–Smith ms. copies, only l. 1 appears; d’Aloe’s account is more complete, and reads HIC REQS / ECIT. Again, the De Rossi Ms. bears the more plausible reading, HIC REQ / ECCH—however, without noting the faded letter that follows, and traces of the beginning of a third line, but only the top of its first letter (Fig. 8). One would be tempted to read:

HIC REQ[VI]  
E(S)CIT A[-]  
.[---]

assuming that the second letter at l. 1 is an S written with the Greek C.<sup>9</sup>



FIGURE 8 Epitaph no. 32

PHOTO G. LACERENZA; COURTESY OF SABAP–BAS

9 Other instances of Greek letters inserted in a Latin context can be seen in no. 46 (epitaph of *Faustina filia Faustini*: H for E, twice, and C for S, once).

*D5*

33. Gallery D, right side; arcosolium D5, to the left, over grave 1; JIWE I 74.

Hebrew letter *šin*.

Still *in situ*.

34. Gallery D, right side; arcosolium D5, grave 3, in the lunette; JIWE I 75.

Epitaph of Secundinus.

Still *in situ*. I have described elsewhere (Lacerenza 2018: 10–11, no. 5) the progressive deterioration of this unique Greek epitaph, written in Hebrew script. There is still some debris in the grave, including a marble mosaic tessera.

*D6*

35. Gallery D, end; arcosolium D6, to the left, grave 3; JIWE I 76.

Epitaph of Faustinus.

Still *in situ* (JIWE, erroneously: grave 2). The lower part of the epitaph has been missing for a long time, and the central menorah and other symbols are also lost (on the right, only a bit of the lulav survives).

36. Gallery D, end; arcosolium D6, to the left, grave 4; JIWE I 77.

Epitaph of Asella.

Lost, aside from some fragments *in situ* (JIWE: *in situ*; erroneously, grave 3). This epitaph, belonging to the wife of the gerusiarch Faustinus, buried in the adjacent grave, was copied while still intact, but very soon after it was heavily damaged by grave robbers. François Lenormant (1883: 204) had already found it without its right side in 1882, and the remaining side of the epitaph collapsed probably not much later. The text was not written on the wall, but on the upper side of the grave itself, over several strata of local clay, mortar, and plaster cladding. Indeed, part of the top right corner of the epitaph still shows signs of markings painted in red (a menorah?). Inside the grave, one can find no fewer than 8 fragments (Fig. 9), previously unnoticed—some belonging to the text (such as the biggest one, with the beginning of ll. 4–5), some possibly to the lulav.

37. Gallery D, end; arcosolium D6, to the right; JIWE I 78.

Epitaph of Faustinus.

Still *in situ*, though almost lost. On the opposite side of the two preceding epitaphs, there are two graves carved into the wall. Above the smallest, to the left, scarce remains of a few letters, painted in red on the white plaster, can be seen.

*D7*

In arcosolium D7—the second and later funerary area of the Faustini family—one can count no fewer than 18 graves, 11 of which were excavated from the





FIGURE 9 Fragments of epitaph no. 36  
 PHOTO G. LACERENZA; COURTESY OF SABAP-BAS

ground, while 7 or more are in monosome or bisome arcosolia in the lateral walls. For the graves in the ground, the arrangement of the epitaphs, always westwards (right side) and then close to the heads of the bodies, does not exactly follow the irregular alignment of the graves. Particularly from graves 5 to 8, there are more inscriptions than graves, and the relationship between each epitaph and the underlying tombs is not yet certain. There is, moreover, considerable confusion, both in 19th-century reports and in later literature, about the positions of the epitaphs, which sometimes appear to be wrong.

38. Gallery D, left side; arcosolium D7, outer face of right wall at the arcosolium opening; JIWE I 79.

Epitaph of Iosef.

Still *in situ*. Painted in red, not inscribed (as per JIWE), though a few letters survive (l. 1: TAΦ[-]; l. 2: [-]CH[-]; l. 4: [-]O[-], plus other fragments). The left side of the epitaph had already been lost by 1853, when it was copied by de Angelis and Smith. In the lower part of the epitaph, the signs interpreted by Ascoli and Frey as a large Hebrew *šîn* are more probably the right arms of a menorah, as suggested by Leon. These arms, however, appear rather narrow, and the presence of a lulav cannot be ruled out.

39. Gallery D, left side; arcosolium D7, left wall of arcosolium opening, at the beginning of the inner face, above grave 1; JIWE I 58.

*Šalom*

Still *in situ* (JIWE: lost). It is very strange that this short inscription was recorded by all the early visitors of the catacomb, from de Angelis and Smith onwards, as existing at the entrance of arcosolium D2. In fact, it can easily be spotted at the entrance of D7, painted in red on the surviving parts of the plaster cladding, towards the bottom (Fig. 10). Currently, this Hebrew *šalom*—the height of the letters ranging from 5 cm (*šin*, *waw*) to 8 cm (*lamed*; final *mem*, 5.5 cm)—stands alone, but the plaster below is intact up to the underlying grave, so above the *šalom* there may have been other words or symbols, now totally lost. It is unlikely, however, that the epitaph of grave 1 was here, as in D7, since all the known inscriptions are on the opposite wall. Some traces of red paint, very faint, can be seen in the same area here and there: these marks may originally have belonged to lost words or letters (see JIWE, which mentions marks visible in de Angelis and Smith's apographs), but currently nothing is legible to the naked eye. Instead, just below the *mem*, one can barely detect a seven-branched menorah, lightly inscribed in the plaster surface, and which seems to have been totally overlooked to this day (Fig. 11). This new menorah is 10 cm high, 9.5 cm wide. Other graffiti below and on the right are clearly modern.

40. Gallery D, left side; arcosolium D7, right side, grave 4; JIWE I 80.

Epitaph of Benricianus.

Still *in situ*. Heavily deteriorated, as already remarked in JIWE, the inscription is set within a frame or *tabula* without handles, actually measuring about 44.5 cm wide (the height cannot be measured due to the loss of the lower part; what remains is 6.5 cm high). When photographed by Müller, it was already badly damaged (Lacerenza 2018: 12, no. 8).

41. Gallery D, left side; arcosolium D7, right side, between graves 4 and 5; JIWE I 83.

Epitaph of (unknown).

Still *in situ* (JIWE: lost). The small red portion of a Hebrew (?) letter, found immediately next to no. 40 (left), may be identifiable with the Greek *omega* detected only by d'Aloe in 1853 (and drawn to the right of d'Aloe's no. 18 (our no. 42)).

42. Gallery D, left side; arcosolium D7, right side, grave 5; JIWE I 82 and 82a.

Epitaph of Vitus.

Lost. The epitaph was seen almost intact by Müller, and was still in this place, though partially damaged, when it was photographed by Colafemmina, along with other text on the same wall (the photograph has been published



FIGURE 10 Arcosolium D7, opening, left wall: Hebrew *shalom*, ancient menorah and modern graffiti

PHOTO G. LACERENZA; COURTESY OF SABAP-BAS



FIGURE 11 Same of fig. 10, with menorah highlighted

PHOTO G. LACERENZA; COURTESY OF SABAP-BAS

in Lacerenza 2018: fig. 7c). From Müller's photograph, it can be inferred that the text was deeply incised, especially on the upper part, and not just painted (Lacerenza 2018: 12, no. 10). According to Daniel Chwolson—who never visited Venosa, but relied on Fabiani's manuscript—a second copy of this text (upper part) existed, but this seems very unlikely, as Noy also remarks (JIWE I 82a).

43. Gallery D, left side; arcosolium D7, right side, grave 6; JIWE I 84.

Epitaph of Pretiosa.

Still *in situ*. This bilingual epitaph is still almost complete and in good condition, except for a test hole that affects ll. 1–3, and a partial loss of plaster along the left border. It is not just painted but also lightly incised. It seems that no one has ever noticed the signs, also painted in red, below the last line (under FI in *filia* and TI in *Biti*), which were part of another line of text or, more likely, belonged to symbols such as a lulav or etrog that accompanied the central, surviving menorah.

44. Gallery D, left side; arcosolium D7, right side, grave 7; JIWE I 81.

Epitaph of (unknown).

Lost. Based on d'Aloe's incorrect description ("in lettere rosse sotto la precedente"), accepted in all subsequent editions, in JIWE it is said that this fragmentary epitaph is found beneath the bilingual inscription of Benricianus (our no. 40). However, this fragment, already in poor condition when photographed by Müller and then by Colafemmina, was actually next to no. 43 (epitaph of Pretiosa): consequently, the complete epitaph probably belonged to grave 7 (not 4).

45. Gallery D, left side; arcosolium D7, right side, first monosome arcosolium above graves 7–8; JIWE I 85.

Epitaph of Andronicus and Rosa.

Still *in situ*. The epitaph is intact, left undisturbed evidently because the wall behind it was not considered large enough to conceal a tomb. The Greek *omega* visible to the left of de Angelis and Smith's copy (24z) cannot be close to the frame itself, lacking any possible space: something was probably scratched or painted just behind the corner, outside the arch to the left, where some signs can be seen. Previously unnoticed, in the blank area above the frame, one or two letters (Hebrew *šin?*) or symbols can be detected, though not easily to the naked eye. Two menorah feet, in the middle of the last line, stick out from the lower border of the *tabula* (which is 30 cm high, 27 and 32 cm wide).

46. Gallery D, left side; arcosolium D7, right side, grave 8; JIWE I 86.

Epitaph of Faustina.

Lost (JIWE: *in situ*, grave 7b). The whole surface on which this inscription was incised and painted is completely missing. The text was still intact at the time of its discovery, and remained so at least until the early 1950s, when it was

examined by Giampiero Bognetti, who in 1954 published a photograph that remains the best image of the epitaph to this day. For unknown reasons, the 1967 reprint of this article did not feature the same image, but another one, showing that in the course of a few years, the inscription had faded and deteriorated, especially the lower part, and had been damaged in the middle—right above the menorah—by grave robbers, who were trying to ascertain via the usual hole whether there was a grave behind it (Bognetti 1954: 199, fig. 2; 1967: pl. xx, between pp. 512–13). This latter photograph may allow us to speculate that the destructive ‘test holes’ in many epitaphs had already been executed before 1967, giving us a *terminus ante quem*. The last testimony of the epitaph is a photograph taken by Colafemmina few years later, still unpublished, in which the inscription appears to have greatly deteriorated and partially collapsed.

47. Gallery D, left side; arcosolium D7, right side, grave 9; JIWE I 87.

Epitaph of Faustinus.

Still *in situ* (JIWE: grave 12). The epitaph was originally framed, as can be seen in d’Aloe’s drawing (21), and part of the frame still survives on two sides (40–41 cm height). Though compromised by the test hole in the middle, right through the menorah, the text is in rather fair condition. The Latin text was painted in large letters on a somewhat dark plaster cladding: it can be noted that since the plaster of the next epitaph on the left (no. 48) partially overlaps this inscription, the Faustinus epitaph must be earlier. This date matches with the genealogical table of the Faustini reconstructed by Williams (1999).

48. Gallery D, left side; arcosolium D7, right side, grave 10; JIWE I 88.

Epitaph of Osses/Ioses and Maria.

Still *in situ* (JIWE: grave 13). The whole top-left angle had already been lost before 1989 (ARS photograph), but was still there in the early ’70s. The first and final lines have almost faded, and the last ones can barely be seen. However, they were scarcely discernible already in 1853, as d’Aloe (no. 22), after the first three lines, adds: “Seguono due altre iscrizioni inintelligibili” (*iscrizioni* here meaning “lines”).

49. Gallery D, left side; arcosolium D7, right side, grave 11; JIWE I 89.

Epitaph of Asella and Sarra.

Still *in situ* (JIWE: grave 14). The right side of the epitaph is lost, including the beginning of the Hebrew formula.

50. Gallery D, left side; arcosolium D7, right side, in the intrados (left side) of the bisome arcosolium above graves 9–11; JIWE I 90.

Epitaph of Gesua and Agnella.

Still *in situ*. This arcosolium is not properly an extension of D7, as indicated in JIWE. The epitaph seems to be in excellent condition based on a number of photographs from the first half of the 20th century, and it was still intact

before the 1980 earthquake, when considerable parts of the plaster cladding in the arcosolium could have fallen down. Yet the inscription is in rather fair condition, aside from the horizontal crack in the middle. The small menorah on the left, on the other hand, has always been barely visible, as the oldest photographs show.

51. Gallery D; JIWE I 91.

Epitaph of (unknown).

Present location unknown. Fragment of tile covered with a stratum of mortar or plaster, with a few Greek letters. Found by Colafemmina towards the middle of gallery D, among the debris, in the proximity of arcosolium Db; however, its original location is unknown, as well as its present location. It could be stored in the repositories of the Museo Archeologico in Venosa, where I was however unable to locate it.

### Gallery E

52. Gallery E, right side (from D); on the ground; unpublished.

Menorah.

*In situ.* While clearing debris from the galleries in 2003 and 2004, a number of graves—no fewer than 108—excavated from the original planking level were found.<sup>10</sup> The existence of burials in the ground had long been known, and many of them were found already damaged. Among those apparently still intact, at the beginning of gallery E, close to a pillar at the corner with D, there is a small grave, covered with a large tile (about 40 × 52 cm) bearing its original stratum of mortar, in which a seven-branched menorah (30 cm high × 36 cm wide, arms irregularly shaped) is roughly incised. This tomb is now visible under a glass panel, while the floor of galleries D, G, F and E is no longer visible, since after the restoration works, it was again covered with a stratum of gravel and pebbles.

### Gallery G

53. Gallery G, right side; 2nd vertical row, above the second loculus from the ground, JIWE I 55.

<sup>10</sup> See Nava 2005: 377. Further notes on the 2003–2004 seasons are in [http://www.fastionline.org/site/AIAC\\_412](http://www.fastionline.org/site/AIAC_412) (last accessed 25 October 2018).

*Šalom.*

Still *in situ*. Since the planking level has been covered and raised in recent years, the graffito is currently about 120 cm from the ground.

### Gallery K

54. Gallery K, right side; on a fragment of plaster; JIWE I 92.

Epitaph of (unknown).

Present location unknown (JIWE: *in situ* [?]). Colafemmina uses the term “cubiculum” to refer to the place where this fragment was found, along with other small fragments, apparently pertaining to other epitaphs also incised on plaster. However, based on 19th-century drawings, it appears that this was a short gallery, possibly leading to another entrance, or a long, polysome arcosolium. In de Angelis and Smith’s report, K is listed among the “corridoio accessori” (accessory galleries).<sup>11</sup>

55. Gallery K, right side; on a fragment of plaster; JIWE I 93.

Epitaph of (unknown).

Present location unknown (JIWE: *in situ*?). Same story as no. 54. For some reason, Colafemmina considered this fragment as part of another epitaph, though their large letters are quite compatible.

### Gallery I

The existence of this lower level of the catacombs was also reported by de Angelis and Smith.<sup>12</sup> It seems that they found it already vandalised, because no inscriptions are indicated here, besides no. 57—which, in fact, can be seen only by scaling the landslide at its end. The gallery, probably older than H and D, is flanked by no fewer than 5 cubacula on the left side (I1–5), and one on

11 Ms. de Angelis–Smith, f. 33r (Lacerenza 1998: 410, pl. 1). It must be added that the works undertaken to secure the entrance to the catacombs substantially transformed galleries C, K, and their arcosolia. K in particular is now a closed room and cannot be reached from the end of gallery E, as was possible in the past. It is now a utility area housing various maintenance devices, with its own door to the outside, to the right of the main entrance.

12 “Altro ramo, che parte dal corridoio principale, si à a sinistra di esso, e quasi alla metà, ove sta un breve dormitorio con sepolcri sul piano, ed altri laterizî; ma che nella fine è sfondato all’angolo di sinistra, e mette dentro ad un corridoio d’un piano piú basso, il quale finisce ad uno di quelli smottati di sopra detti”: Ms. de Angelis–Smith, f. 6r (Lacerenza 1998: 382–83). This is a clear description of Gallery I, which ends in a dramatic collapse.

the right (I6); along the right wall, some loculi were also excavated. The shape of all these cubicula is rather different from the polysome arcosolia in D, as they are more regularly shaped and have been excavated in a different way; it would thus seem more appropriate here to speak of cubicula. The collapse of the final part of the gallery hides its last section and, on the left, just one more cubiculum can be detected (I5), in a better state of preservation. The junction between galleries I and N is by no means clear (and strangely enough, N is totally lacking in Dell'Aquila's plan; 1979: fig. 5). Colafemmina says that galleries M and N were destroyed by this collapse.<sup>13</sup>

56. Gallery I, left side; outer face of the right wall at the entrance of cubiculum I4; *JWE I*, p. 132.

Menorah.

Still *in situ*. de Angelis and Smith didn't notice this graffito, reported only by Colafemmina (1974).

57. Gallery I, left side; cubiculum I5; *JWE I* 97.

Epitaph of Romulus.

Still *in situ*. The epitaph is actually incised, not painted. Though de Angelis and Smith found the tomb still intact, this burial was subsequently damaged, and only the right side of the epitaph remains (PΩMΩ).

## Gallery L

The access to gallery L is closed for safety reasons. Here the area indeed becomes more susceptible to landslides and collapses of the vaults, with even large rocks tending to fall. At the time of the first explorations, the gallery floor was covered in a large amount of debris, as can be seen in de Angelis and Smith's plan (while in d'Aloe's drawing, there is just a short, barely legible note, apparently reading "parte lesionata", i.e. "damaged section"). Years ago I was allowed a quick glimpse inside and, as far as I can remember, at the beginning of the gallery—which has been partially cleared—the wall on the left side had almost totally collapsed, with just a few rows of the lower level still standing; the loculi were all broken, though some still bore fragments of their original covering inside. The right side of the gallery, on the other hand, appeared to be in better condition by far, with many loculi intact, some of which still preserved the epitaph, or part of it. I did not have the chance to systematically copy all of them. No updated land survey of this area is yet available. The plans

<sup>13</sup> Colafemmina (1974: 95) says that it was the same event that affected gallery L.



of de Angelis and Smith, Dell'Aquila and those published by Nava (2005: fig. 20) disagree on many details.

58. Gallery L, right side; 4th vertical row, 1st (or 2nd) horizontal row of loculi, 1st loculus from the ground; unpublished.

Epitaph of (?).

Found *in situ*. On the fourth *pila*, close to the ground, on a burial, I was barely able to read the following, incised in the mortar, on the right side:

ΑΟΚΥC  
[?]KIMA (?)  
שלו [ם]  
(menorah)

of which only the first word, Latin *locus* (“burial”) written in Greek letters, and the final *šalom* are certain.<sup>14</sup>

59. Gallery L, at the beginning; JIWE I 99.

Epitaph of Esperatus.

Not found (JIWE: *in situ*). Colafemmina doesn't provide details about the location of this loculus, which he had found at the beginning of the gallery, when it was still full of rubble.

60. Gallery L, at the beginning; JIWE I 100.

Epitaph of Primitivus (?).

Not found (JIWE: lost). It seems that this inscription was somewhere on the right side at the beginning of the gallery, thus not far from our no. 57. The reading of the name as Primitivus, suggested by Noy, seems acceptable.

61. Gallery L, after the junction with gallery M (?); to this day, only a short note has been published (Nava 2005: 377).

Epitaph of Mercurius.

Not found. This epitaph was discovered during the works carried out in gallery L, somewhere not far from a corner leading to another gallery to the right, probably M. A photograph of the epitaph has been published in *Atti Magna Grecia 2004* (Nava 2005: pl. XXXIIIb), and the same picture is available on a panel on display outside the gallery. The text, incised on a loculus found intact, reads: ΤΑΦΟC ΜΕΡΚΩΡΙΩ[C], i.e. τάρφος Μερκο(ύ)ριος.

14 In my notebook, I also reported another text here, starting with ENTA KITE (*sic*). I was unable to verify this reading or the position of the tomb a second time.

### Gallery N

62–65. Gallery N, locations unspecified; JIWE I 95, 94, 98, 96.

Epitaph of Numerius.

Epitaph of Ioses.

Epitaph of (unknown).

Epitaph of (unknown).

Not found (JIWE: *in situ*). Colafemmina's description of the places where he saw these epitaphs is not clear. At any rate, the area currently cannot be reached for further inspection.

### Gallery O

66–67. Gallery O, locations unspecified; JIWE I 101–102.

Not found (JIWE: *in situ* and lost, respectively). It appears that de Angelis and Smith succeeded in accessing this gallery, but it is not clear if they reached it from I, L or N. No descriptions of the places are available.

### Gallery P

68. Gallery P, right side, at the beginning; JIWE I p. 135.

Menorah.

Not found, but probably still *in situ*.

### Gallery Q

#### Q1

69–70. Gallery Q, left side; arcosolium Q1, graves 3–4; JIWE I 103, 104–105.

Epitaph of Marcellus.

Epitaph of Leontios.

Not found. Colafemmina explored gallery Q several times with Dell'Aquila, but apparently never investigated it again.<sup>15</sup> As suggested by Noy, it is prob-

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15 For various reasons, the report on these discoveries remained only at a preliminary stage. In Colafemmina (1978), which is still the main treatment of the subject, it must be taken into account that while in pl. I the inscriptions in Q1 are indicated with letters (a, b, c), in the text they are numbered 1, 2, 3. The same applies to Q2 (4, 5, 6 = d, e, f).

able that the Hebrew eulogy [ע]ל [ישראל] (JIWE I 105), painted on a fragment found inside grave 4 and of which no photograph was published, belonged to the epitaph of Leontios, found *in situ* at the head of the same tomb (JIWE I 104).

### Q<sub>2</sub>

71–73. Gallery Q, left side; arcosolium Q<sub>2</sub>, graves 6–7 and right extension, grave 1; JIWE I 106–108.

Epitaph of (unknown).

Epitaph of Augusta.

Epitaph of (unknown).

Not seen. Same situation as 69–70 in Q<sub>1</sub>.

### Q(?)

74–75. Gallery Q, place not specified; JIWE I 110.

Epitaph of (unknown).

Epitaph of (unknown).

Not seen. Colafemmina does not specify where these two fragments were found.

### Q<sub>3</sub>

76. Gallery Q, arcosolium Q<sub>3</sub>; JIWE I 109.

Epitaph of (unknown).

Not found. This fragment apparently belonged to the epitaph of the well-known painted arcosolium at the end of Q (that can be labelled as ‘Q<sub>3</sub>’), though in the upper catacomb, no other epitaphs incised on marble slabs are known; moreover, no other parts of the inscription have been found *in situ*.

### Unknown Places

77. Unspecified location in the upper catacombs; JIWE I 111.

Epitaph of Vitus and Vincomalus.

Not found, and not yet located in the repositories of the Venosa National Archaeological Museum. The text appears in the De Rossi Ms., but the text could have been deduced from the copy of N. Müller, who saw it in Venosa in 1884, where, as he says (Müller 1886: 56), he reconstructed the epitaph, originally painted in red on the plaster covering of a loculus, from more than 40 pieces. All of Müller’s photographs, as they are currently known, were taken in gallery D, but the epitaph could well have been found elsewhere.

## 78. Unspecified location in the upper catacombs; JIWE I 112.

Fragment (?). Not found. A few letters ([-]TEC[-]) only in the De Rossi Ms.

## Concordance

No.	de Angelis– Smith	d’Aloe	Ascoli	CIL IX	CIJ	JIWE I	Colafemmina
1	1 a	A	–	6195	580	42	–
2	2 b	B	–	6196	589	44	–
3	–	–	–	–	–	43	1975: VII
4	–	–	–	–	–	45	1975: VI
5	3 c	–	–	6197	588	46	–
6	10 k	6	3	6204	579	47	–
7	9 i	4	13	6203	594	48	–
8	4 d	1	–	6198	574	49	–
9	8 h	5	–	6202	577	50	–
10	5 e	2	–	6199	618	51	–
11	6 f	3	–	6200	576	52	–
12	7 g	–	–	6201	587	53	–
13	–	–	–	–	604	54	–
14	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
15	41 r	26	–	6236	612	56	–
16	30 f	25	1	6225	572	57	–
17	31 g	–	–	6226	581	59	–
18	–	–	–	–	–	60	1974: IV
19	34 k	29	16	6229	599	61	–
20	35 l	31	–	6230	590	62	–
21	36 m	30	6	6231	606	63	–
22	37 n	32	4	6232	596	64	–
23	38 o	–	–	6233	598	65	–
24	39 p	–	–	6234	591	66	–
25	33 i	27–28	–	6228	615	67	–
26	32 h	–	–	6227	610	68	–
27	12 m	8	–	6206	583	69	–
28	11 l	7	12	6205	584	70	–
29	15 p	11	5	6209	597	71	–
30	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
31	14 o	9	2	6208	575	72	–
32	13 n	10	–	6207	619	73	–

*(cont.)*

No.	de Angelis- Smith	d'Aloe	Ascoli	CIL IX	CIJ	JIWE I	Colafemmina
33	-	-	-	-	-	74	1974: V
34	16 q	12	17	6210	595	75	-
35	19 t	15	10	6213	600	76	-
36	18 s	14	7	6212	578	77	-
37	17 r	13	-	6211	601	78	-
38	20 u	-	8	6214	586	79	-
39	40 q	-	9	6235	573	58	-
40	21 v	16	14	6215	609	80	-
41	-	18 (ω)	-	-	-	83	-
42	22 x	18	21	6217	569	82-82a	-
43	23 y	19	18	6218	570	84	-
44	-	17	20	6216	571	81	-
45	24 z	-	11	6219	607	85	1975: VIII
46	25 a	20	19	6220	611	86	-
47	26 b	21	15	6221	613	87	-
48	27 c	22	-	6222	616	88	-
49	28 d	23	-	6223	608	89	-
50	29 e	24	-	6224	614	90	-
51	-	-	-	-	-	91	1974: II
52	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
53	-	-	-	-	-	55	1983: 1
54	-	-	-	-	-	92	1974: IIIa
55	-	-	-	-	-	93	1974: IIIb
56	-	-	-	-	-	p.13 <sup>2</sup>	1974, p. 95
57	44 u	-	-	6239	592	97	-
58	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
59	-	-	-	-	-	99	1975: I
60	42 s	-	-	6237	617	100	-
61	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
62	-	-	-	-	-	95	1975: II
63	43 t	-	-	6238	585	94	1975: III
64	-	-	-	-	-	98	1975: IV
65	-	-	-	-	-	96	1975: V

*(cont.)*

No.	de Angelis- Smith	d'Aloe	Ascoli	CIL IX	CIJ	JIWE I	Colafemmina
66	45 v	–	–	6240	582	101	–
67	46 x	–	–	6241	603	102	–
68	–	–	–	–	–	p. 135	1974, p. 95
69	–	–	–	–	–	103	1978: 1
70	–	–	–	–	–	104–105	1978: 2–3
71	–	–	–	–	–	106	1978: 4
72	–	–	–	–	–	107	1978: 5
73	–	–	–	–	–	108	1978: 6
74	–	–	–	–	–	110	1978: fr. a
75	–	–	–	–	–	110	1978: fr. b
76	–	–	–	–	–	109	1978: fr. c
77	–	–	–	–	593	111	–
78	–	–	–	–	602	112	–

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